

POSITION STATEMENT: BIOSAFETY IN THE TIME OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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**POSITION STATEMENT OF THE STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE:  
BIOSAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS (REC: BEE) ON COVID-19 RELATED RESEARCH  
IN THE TIME OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

<b>Target group</b>	All investigators who are actively embarking on, engaged in or planning to do biological research or testing directly related to the COVID-19 outbreak.
<b>Publication date</b>	1 April 2020
<b>Document active</b>	1 April 2020 until further notice and with agreement from the Vice-Rector (Research, Innovation and Postgraduate Studies) SU
<b>Authors</b>	Research Ethics Committee: Biosafety and Environmental Ethics (REC: BEE), SU

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### Background

A state of national disaster has been declared in South Africa as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. President Cyril Ramaphosa implemented a nationwide 21-day lockdown starting at midnight, Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> March 2020. At this time, all but critical research activities at SU are suspended. In line with the stance of the HREC, the general consensus is that studies with an inherent risk to researchers and participants should not be embarked on during the current lockdown period, any extension or re-instatement thereof, or in any subsequent period where social distancing is being implemented. However, we recognise the urgent and important need for certain COVID-19-related activities and wish to affirm the REC: BEE stance on these

### COVID-19 related scientific activities:

- All research that is potentially hazardous to humans, animals or the environment, involving recombinant DNA, pathogens and infectious agents, or biological toxins requires REC: BEE approval prior to commencement.
- However, the REC: BEE recognises the urgency and strategic importance of COVID-19-related work, and would therefore carefully consider work related to the global and national health emergency imposed by the COVID-19 outbreak, for example diagnostic testing.
- Although the REC: BEE review of proposed COVID-19 related laboratory studies will most likely require full committee review, the REC: BEE will endeavour to expedite such review if deemed necessary, according to own capacity and if supported by the relevant faculty(s).
- Members of REC: BEE will be available for guidance/consultation to ensure that applications meet required criteria, that biological safety is ensured and appropriate risk assessments have been conducted. (See REC: BEE webpage for contact information)
- Where applicable, researchers would also need to comply with any requirements as outlined in applicable HREC or REC: SBE documents.

### Important documents and contact details

- [CDC interim laboratory Biosafety Guidelines for Handling and Processing Specimens Associated with COVID-19](#)
- The National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) hotline: 0800 029 999 (number operational Monday to Friday from 08:00 until 16:00).
- Campus Health Services: Stellenbosch Campus 021 808 3496/3494;  
Tygerberg Campus 021 938 9590
- Campus Health Services after hours emergency number: 076 431 0305
- [SU COVID-19 Web page](#)
- [Position statement and REC guidelines on Research in the time of COVID-19](#)
- [HREC position statement](#)
- [REC: SBE position statement](#)
- [REC: BEE web page](#)